

# Coaching for Performance

FIFTH EDITION

# 1 What Is Coaching?

*Coaching focuses on future possibilities, not past mistakes*

Despite the existence of the International Coach Federation (ICF) with members in 138 countries, if you look up “coach” or “coaching” on the Oxford Dictionaries website, you’ll be none the wiser as to what all these people are up to. It offers two definitions. The first mentions a bus used for longer journeys, a railway carriage, and traveling. The second includes sports instruction or training, private tuition, and extra teaching. It might surprise you to learn that the first is more relevant. Coaching is all about a journey and nothing about instruction or teaching. It is as much if not more about the way things are done as about what is done. Coaching delivers results in large measure because of the powerful working relationship created, and the means and style of communication used. The coachee does acquire facts and develops new skills and behaviors, not by being told or taught but by discovering from within, stimulated by coaching. Of course, the objective of improving performance is paramount, and how that is best achieved and sustained is what is in question.

## **The Inner Game**

Let us take a look at the birth of modern-day coaching. Timothy Gallwey was perhaps the first to demonstrate a simple but comprehensive method of coaching over four decades ago. A Harvard educationalist and tennis expert, he threw down the gauntlet in 1974 with a book entitled *The Inner Game of Tennis*, which was quickly followed by *Inner Skiing* and *The Inner Game of Golf*.

The word “inner” was used to indicate the player’s internal state or, to use Gallwey’s words, that “the opponent within one’s own head is more formidable than the one the other side of the net.” Anyone who has had

one of those days on the court when you can't do anything right will recognize what he is referring to. Gallwey went on to claim that if a coach can help a player to remove or reduce the internal obstacles to performance, an unexpected natural ability to learn and to perform will occur without the need for much technical input from the coach.

### The Inner Game Equation

To illustrate this, Gallwey created a simple Inner Game Equation which, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see very effectively summarizes the objective of modern coaching:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Performance} &= \text{potential} - \text{interference} \\ P &= p - i\end{aligned}$$

Both the Inner Game and Coaching about improving performance (P) by growing potential (p) and by decreasing interference (i).

*Internal obstacles are often more daunting than external ones.*

At the time Gallwey's books first appeared, few coaches, instructors, or professional sportspeople could believe his ideas, let alone embrace them, although players devoured them eagerly in bestseller-list quantities. The professionals' ground of being was under threat. They thought that Gallwey was trying to turn the teaching of sport on its head and that he was undermining their egos, their authority, and the principles in which they had invested so much. In a way he was, but their fear exaggerated their fantasies about his intentions. He was not threatening them with redundancy, merely proposing that they would be more effective if they changed their approach.

### The essence of coaching

We can see from all this that Gallwey *had* put his finger on the essence of coaching. Indeed, my definition of coaching describes the link to the Inner Game and all it stands for: **Coaching is unlocking people's poten-**

**tial to maximize their own performance.** It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them. After all, how did you learn to walk? Did your mother or father instruct you? We all have a built-in, natural learning capability that is actually disrupted by instruction.

This idea was not new: Socrates had voiced the same concept some 2,000 years earlier, but somehow his philosophy got lost in the rush to materialistic reductionism of the last two centuries. The pendulum has swung back and coaching, if not Socrates, is here to stay for a century or three yet! Gallwey's books coincided with the emergence of a more optimistic psychological model of humankind than the old behaviorist view that we are little more than empty vessels into which everything has to be poured. The new model suggested we are more like acorns, each of which contains within it all the potential to be a magnificent oak tree. We need nourishment, encouragement, and the light to reach toward, but the oakreeness is already within us.

If we accept this model – and few people now contest it – the way we learn, and more importantly the way we teach and instruct, must be called into question. Unfortunately, habits die hard and old methods persist, even though most of us know their limitations. It may be harder to give up instructing than it is to learn to coach.

Let me extend the acorn analogy a step further. You may not be aware that oak saplings, growing from acorns in the wild, quickly develop a single, hair-thin tap root to seek out water. This may extend downward as far as a meter while the sapling is still only 30cm tall. When grown commercially in a nursery, the tap root tends to coil in the bottom of the pot and is broken off when the sapling is transplanted, setting back its development severely while a replacement grows. Insufficient time is taken to preserve the tap root and most growers do not even know of its existence or purpose.

When transplanting a sapling, the wise gardener will uncoil the tender tap root, weight its tip, and carefully thread it down a long, vertical hole driven deep into the earth with a metal bar. The small amount of time invested in this process so early in the tree's life ensures its survival, and allows it to develop faster and become stronger than its commercially grown siblings. Wise business leaders use coaching to emulate the good gardener.

In the past, the universal proof of the success of new coaching methods

was hard to demonstrate because few people had understood and used them fully. This is now changing and I hope that the additional models I have included in this book will support this further. However, many coaches have been unwilling to set aside old, proven ways for long enough to reap the rewards of new ones. Recently, as much through necessity as progress, employee engagement has been proven to be linked to performance, and so all the behaviors that underpin engagement – which are all coaching behaviors, such as collaborating, meaningful goal setting, delegating, and accountability – have found their way into business language and, more importantly, into behavior too.

## Mentoring

Since I am defining coaching, I should perhaps mention mentoring, another word that is now common in business parlance. The word originates from Greek mythology, in which it is reported that Odysseus, when setting out for Troy, entrusted his house and the education of his son Telemachus to his friend, Mentor. “Tell him all you know,” Odysseus said, and thus unwittingly set some limits to mentoring.

Some people use the term mentoring interchangeably with coaching. However, mentoring is very different to coaching, because coaching is not dependent on a more experienced person passing down their knowledge – in fact, this undermines the building of self-belief which creates sustained performance, as we shall discover. Instead, coaching requires expertise in coaching, not in the subject at hand. That is one of its great strengths. And something that coaching leaders grapple with most – but is key – is to learn when to share and when not to.

Mike Sprecklen was the coach and mentor to the famous all-conquering rowing pair Andy Holmes and Steve Redgrave. “I was stuck, I had taught them all I knew technically,” Sprecklen said on completion of a Coaching for Performance workshop many years ago, “but this opens up the possibility of going further, for they can feel things that I can’t even see.” He had discovered a new way forward with them, working from their experience and perceptions rather than from his own. Good coaching and leading, and good mentoring for that matter, can and should take a coachee beyond the limitations of the coach, leader, or mentor’s own knowledge.

## Inner Business

Many years ago I sought out Tim Gallwey, was trained by him, and founded the Inner Game in Britain. We soon formed a small team of Inner Game coaches. At first all were trained by Gallwey, but later we trained our own. We ran Inner Tennis courses and Inner Skiing holidays, and many golfers freed up their swings with Inner Golf. It was not long before our sporting clients began to ask us if we could apply the same methods to prevailing issues in their companies; IBM was the first. On the ski slopes of the Alps, leaders discovered a revolutionary way of learning to ski using the Inner Game and wanted us to help them bring this approach to their work. What is of note here is that the simple methods could be readily applied to almost any situation. Of course, the rest is history – we pioneered this new approach in business, which we called “performance coaching.” All the leading exponents of business coaching today graduated from this and have been profoundly influenced by the Gallwey school of coaching.

Since 1982, Performance Consultants has built and elaborated on those first methods and adapted them to the practical issues and conditions of today’s business environment. Indeed, our team has partnered with clients to apply coaching to such diverse topics as employee engagement, Lean methodology, and safety. We have specialized in teaching leaders to coach and transform organizations and also in providing expert coaching for executives and for business teams. Although coaches have to compete with one another in the market, they tend to be friends and not infrequently work together. This in itself speaks highly of the method, for it was Gallwey who suggested that your opponent in tennis is really your friend if they make you stretch and run. Opponents are not friends if they just pat the ball back to you, as that will not help you to improve your game, and isn’t that what we are all trying to do in our different fields?

Although Gallwey, my more senior colleagues in Performance Consultants, and many others who now practice coaching in the business arena cut our teeth in sport, coaching in sport itself has changed little overall. It remains significantly behind the methodology of coaching that is virtually universal in business today. That is because when we introduced coaching into business 35 years ago, the word was new in that context and did not

bring with it the baggage of a long history of past practice. We were able to introduce new concepts without having to fight old prejudices, and old practitioners, of old coaching.

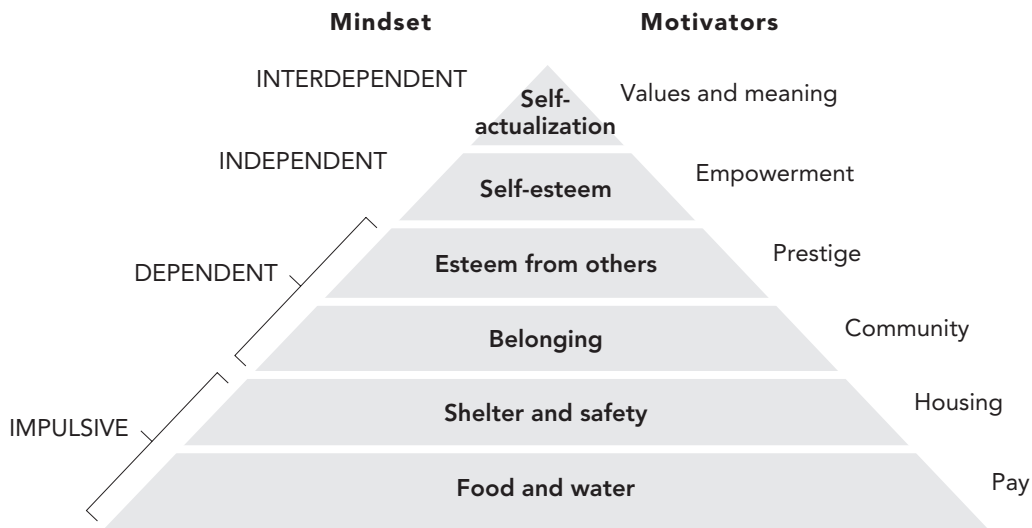
That is not to say that we met no resistance to coaching in business; we still do at times from people who have remained strangely insulated from or blind to change. Coaching as a practice in business is here to stay, although the word itself might disappear as its associated values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors become the norm for everyone, as I explore in this book. My hope is that this Fifth Edition will lay the foundation for this to occur.

## **Mindset and Maslow**

Gallwey was building on the work of others. About 20 years before him, in the 1950s, American psychologist Abraham Maslow broke away from the tradition of delving into pathology to try to understand human nature. He studied mature, complete, successful, and fulfilled people, and concluded that we could all be that way. In fact, he asserted that this was the natural human state. All we had to do, in his opinion, was to overcome our inner blocks to development and maturity. Maslow, along with Carl Rogers and others, was the father of the more optimistic wave of psychological thinking that is still in the process of displacing carrot-and-stick behaviorism as the best way of managing and motivating people. Psychological optimism is essential if we are fully to embrace coaching as the leadership style of the future.

Maslow is best known in business circles for his Hierarchy of Needs. This model suggests that our most basic need is for food and water, and that we will care for little else (except possibly a mobile phone!) until that physiological need is met. Once we have secured a supply of food and water, we begin to concern ourselves with items such as shelter, clothing, and safety. And once we have met, at least in part, these physical needs, we begin to focus on our social needs, including the need to belong to a grouping. These needs are met in part by our family, but later we also meet them in pubs, clubs, and teams.

FIGURE 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Next we seek to satisfy our desire for respect and admiration – the need for esteem from others – by display and by competing for power, victory, or recognition. In terms of mindset, these emotional needs are **dependent** on the presence of others and are eventually displaced by a subtle shift to the need for self-esteem, or as I prefer to call it **self-belief** (the bedrock of coaching and the prerequisite for high performance). Here we demand higher standards of ourselves and look to our own criteria by which we measure ourselves, rather than to how others see us. In terms of mindset, we have become **independent**.

Maslow's highest state was the self-actualizing person, who emerges when both the esteem needs (respect from others and belief in self) are satisfied and individuals are no longer driven by the need to prove themselves, either to themselves or to anyone else. These latter two needs are personal and are free of any external dependency. Maslow called the final stage *self-actualizing* rather than *self-actualized*, because he saw it as a never-ending journey. The primary need associated with self-actualizers is the need for meaning and purpose in their lives. They want their work, their activities, and their existence to have some value, to be a contribution to others. They are **interdependent**. I will discuss

this vital performance leap from independence to interdependence in the next chapter.

### **MOTIVATION AT WORK**

People will seek to engage in those activities that help them to meet their needs. They are likely to be only partially conscious of this process. Work has naturally developed in ways that do help meet those needs, and now it has to develop to the next level. At the basic level, work does meet people's primary needs by giving them an income with which they can feed, water, clothe, and house their families. Furthermore, work offers promotion, prestige, pay grades, and even a company car via which to solicit the esteem of others. The normal motivator used in work, rewards in various currencies, goes some of the way to meeting the survival needs, the belonging needs, and even the lower of the two esteem needs. Very clever so far.

However, society today is collectively seeking need satisfaction slightly higher up the hierarchy. Reward systems are beginning to reflect changes at that level.

### **SELF-BELIEF**

Whereas Maslow used the collective term "esteem needs" and made the important distinction between esteem from others and self-esteem, I prefer to use terms that are more descriptive of mindset, for the former "dependence" and for the latter "self-belief."

Self-belief is not created by prestige and privilege, which are more symbolic than substantial. It is built when someone is seen to be worthy of making choices. Promotion without genuine empowerment and the opportunity to express potential is counterproductive. While telling negates choice, disempowers, limits potential, and demotivates, coaching does the opposite.

### **MILLENNIALS SEEK MEANING AND PURPOSE**

Some employees, especially younger ones, are showing signs of seeking self-actualizing needs. They want their work to be of value and to have meaning and purpose, and traditional organizations are losing out as a result. These organizations must understand that lining the pockets of

shareholders is no longer seen as meaningful. Companies are obliged to consider more carefully their ethics and values and the needs of all their stakeholders, including employees first and foremost, but also customers, the community, and the environment.

These are the issues that leaders and employees on the workshops we run are raising more and more frequently. Companies are seeking a change of leadership style, and employees are demanding it. If these young and, in Maslow's terms, more mature employees are not to become disaffected, the changes need to get underway immediately. So important is this issue, and so enormous will be the benefits to performance and ultimately to the triple bottom line of people, profit, and planet, that in this edition I have reorganized the book to address it more fully.

### **THE CHOICE OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR**

While millennials are demanding this change in leadership style, leaders do not know how to provide it. Of the four criteria that cause us to adapt our management behavior in the moment, the development of our employees gets the lowest priority. At the head of the list comes time pressure, then fear, and next comes the quality of the job or the product, leaving employee development a poor fourth. Shortage of time and excess fear drive us into command and control, while the quality of work and the need for development demand coaching.

It comes as little surprise that coaching is sometimes sidelined by short-termism and the urgency of the need to provide shareholder returns. However, the wake-up call has been sounded in the changing expectations of younger employees. At job interviews they want to know what training and development opportunities and what management style they can expect. They do not seek – and nor do they want – a job for life, and they will leave a job if their needs are not met. And those needs are for things that will help their self-belief, such as a coaching management style.

### **Leadership and service**

Most business leaders today have reached Maslow's status and recognition level – and this is where they can do the most harm. They are often arrogant, assertive, domineering, and self-important. They will do anything

to get more pay; they don't need or deserve it, but it is a way of measuring and asserting their status.

However, if a business leader does escape the trap and progress to the next level, the need for self-belief, the leadership news gets better. Leaders who aspire to be there, or are there, will really try to do the "right" thing, rather than trying to appear to do the right thing or to do things right. Only being authentic gives the feel-good factor that accompanies self-belief. What this is all about, of course, is the emergence of broader altruistic values – leading for others rather than for oneself.

Leadership by people any lower than this on the scale has a selfish element regardless of the other skills they might possess. Such leadership is only useful to those they lead if those employees happen to have the same aspirations. And while leaders at the level of self-belief are well motivated, they might seek to be a little more high profile than a leader who has reached the next level – self-actualizing. This is sometimes called the level of service. Service is often seen as the answer to the search for meaning and purpose, something that people used to gain from their religion but now look for elsewhere, including while at work. Service to others manifests in a wide spectrum of forms, is very fulfilling, and is the universal way to meeting this need. One of the leaders of a multinational manufacturing company who attended an in-house program we ran for global leaders said: "I have realized that I love my work – my job is to develop people every day!"

Toward the end of his life, Maslow added another level that he called self-realization. However, as I have said, development is a journey, not a destination. Some recent commentators also define self-actualizing more modestly and flatter business leaders by suggesting that they, and indeed many others, are at this level. I do not share that view. As far as I am concerned, in order to earn the title of leader a person must have evolved beyond the status and recognition level and beyond self-interest. Aspiring leaders will hone their leadership skills at lower levels while they are growing into the job, but their power to exercise control over others should be constrained until they have grown up.

The good news is that change is in the air, evolution marches on despite expected resistance, environmental concerns are becoming integrated into business strategy as opposed to being a tick-box exercise for appearances,

and this is further driven by consumer and public demand for transparency, which is becoming more effective at policing business excesses, often via the internet.

Evolution is key if we are to rise to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

### **Leadership style needs to evolve**

The need toward which a large segment of modern society is beginning to move is that for self-belief and independence, with a few people yearning for self actualization and interdependence. Traditional businesses and management methods of command and control which create dependence are very poor at meeting this need, and that is what has to change. In fact, I believe that leaders fail to do so principally because they have simply never been taught how. The only way they learned was by being told. Adult learning theory tells us that adults learn in a completely different way to children. Self-belief is central to this. Coaching is adult learning in practice.